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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLGB #0208/01 1030712  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 130712Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5999  
INFO RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0432  
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0528  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 1341  
RUEHFN/AMEMBASSY FREETOWN 0024  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2126  
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0679  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0445  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 1459  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0708  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 2064  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0226

C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000208

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RW](#)  
SUBJECT: RWANDA -- MONTHLY POLITICAL ROUNDUP

REF: A. KIGALI 162  
[1](#)B. KIGALI 78  
[1](#)C. 08 KIGALI 872

Classified By: Ambassador Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (U) In this edition:

- Government Hears Journalists' Concerns on Media Law
- Rwanda Takes Prisoners From Sierra Leone Special Court
- Nkunda Hearing Postponed
- Political Party Provisionally Denied Registration

Springtime Thaw in Government-Media Relations  
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[1](#)2. (U) The Ministry of Information and the GOR's media monitoring and advocacy body, the Media High Council (MHC), held consultative meetings with journalists in March to discuss relations between the government and the media and draft media legislation.

[1](#)3. (C) On March 13, four journalists representing independent publications which had been "blacklisted" from GOR functions met with the MHC to develop resolutions on how to improve interaction between the GOR and journalists. Charles Kabonero, editor-in-chief of the banned publication Umuseso, told EmbOff the MHC was "open and willing to change" the soured relationship between some critical journalists and the GOR. Kabonero outlined the meeting's agreed-upon recommendations, which included increased communication between journalists and the MHC on abuses of media freedom, and the MHC taking a more active media advocacy stance. However, Kabonero expressed doubt there would be substantial action to that end until a new MHC board is in place (Note: The current term for the MHC board has expired, so a new board is expected soon. End note).

[1](#)4. (SBU) Minister of Information Louise Mushikiwabo met with media practitioners and other stakeholders on March 20, inviting comments on the text of a media law passed by both houses of Parliament and now, she said, before the President for signature (parliamentary sources say the text has not officially been passed to the presidency, as final translations into French and English are still pending). The nearly-finished law has drawn renewed criticism from local

journalists, including one influential journalist who apparently expressed his reservations in a recent meeting with Presidential advisors. In her meeting, Mushikiwabo told participants the GOR adopted a new media policy during its annual retreat in February, in which Ministers were encouraged to meet with the press regularly and be held accountable by the journalistic community. Mushikiwabo apparently chastised assembled journalists for not raising their concerns with the law when it was with the drafting commission, but assured them it was not too late to change controversial issues. In particular, journalists flagged articles requiring university training in journalism for GOR accreditation, and those related to privacy, protection of sources, and defamation. Mushikiwabo asked journalists to freely offer their input on the law in the discussion and said President Paul Kagame was "ready to hear and consider" their claims.

15. (SBU) Comment. Increased positive interaction between the GOR and the media is an encouraging sign; changes to the draft media law would be welcomed by many local journalists, particularly those who lack the requisite university

training. There are catch-up provisions in the new law, but many of the affected journalists would prefer not to have to meet them. End Comment.

#### Rwanda Agrees to Accept Prisoners From Sierra Leone Court

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16. (U) On March 18, the Rwandan government (GOR) signed an accord with the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) under which convicted prisoners from the court will serve out their sentences at the Mpanga prison in southern Rwanda. The visiting Registrar, Herman von Hebel, praised the Dutch-built Mpanga prison, which contains a newly-constructed separate wing for high-profile prisoners, as one "meeting and exceeding" international standards. In a press release, the SCSL noted that the accord had been "brokered" by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), and that eight persons had so far been convicted by the SCSL, with five sentenced to 15 to 50 years in prison, the others awaiting sentencing. The accord provides for eight of the wing's 30 cells at Mpanga to be available for use by the SCSL, the release noted. Sources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told us that, "given how long it takes UN tribunals to convict people and then hear their appeals," the GOR did not anticipate receiving all eight convicted prisoners "for quite some time."

17. (SBU) Comment. This accord benefits the SCSL, the GOR and the ICTR. The SCSL has found an acceptable prison in Africa for its convicts, and a government willing to take them, not something always easy to do. The GOR has had its Mpanga prison publicly ratified by a UN tribunal as a more than acceptable facility for high-profile prisoners. In its long-standing appeal to the international community to extradite suspected genocidaires to Rwanda for trial, the GOR now has an international seal of approval for its detention facilities. The ICTR, anxious like the SCSL to find acceptable facilities for its convicts, and specifically to transfer cases and prisoners to Rwanda (something its own review panels have so far declined to do), can point to Mpanga prison as a suitable facility for its prisoners, as recognized by a brother UN tribunal. End Comment.

#### Nkunda Case Refiled in Gisenyi, Subsequently Postponed

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18. (SBU) Following denial of a March 11 application to a Kigali court for release of Laurent Nkunda from Rwandan custody (Ref A), his legal team attempted to file an similar application before a military court, also in Kigali. Rebuffed by the military court, his legal team then traveled to Gisenyi, where Nkunda is reportedly being held, and

successfully filed an application there. Originally scheduled for March 25, Nkunda's legal team (which has till now not been allowed to see him) requested a postponement of the hearing until April 17. Aside from pushing the hearing date beyond the traditional genocide commemoration ceremonies in early April, local legal counsel said the postponement also gave time for various "useful discussions" to continue on the ultimate fate of Nkunda, possibly alluding to various proposed CNDP amnesty provisions, and continuing discussions between the GOR and the Congolese government. In a communique issued by the Rwandan and Congolese governments following their "Four Plus Four" talks in Kinshasa March 27-28, the two sides pledged to have their justice ministers confer on his fate and "offer advice" on the issue.

¶9. (C) Comment. Nkunda's legal team appears suddenly much less anxious to see him freed from Rwandan custody, at least through its own efforts. The team may hope that discussions between the two governments, including deliberations between the two justice ministers, could offer an acceptable compromise. End Comment.

#### PSI Denied Registration

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¶10. (SBU) In early March, the Ministry of Local Government (MINILOC) denied registration to the Ideal Social Party (PSI), a new political party founded in December, 2008, which held its first organizing congress in February (refs B and C). In announcing the denial, the Ministry declared that PSI: 1) had not gathered sufficient people for its congress, properly documented, from around the country (needing five from each of 30 districts); 2) had in violation of the law used an acronym (PSI) of a well-known and registered NGO, Population Services International; and 3) had violated constitutional requirements governing the number of women for party executive officers, 30 percent of which must be held by women. Party founder Bernard Ntaganda told pol/econ chief March 9 that his party had sufficient persons present at the congress with adequate ID (despite some having ID problems), had appointed enough women after the congress to executive positions to meet legal requirements, and did not violate the law on naming conventions for registered organizations. He claimed some women candidates for executive positions had been "intimidated" from attending the congress. Finally, he added he could not raise sufficient cash to stage another congress (at a cost of about USD 30,000), the only way to legally change the name of the party.

¶11. (SBU) A MINILOC official told emboffs later that the Ministry had "bent over backwards" when evaluating PSI documentation, but Ntaganda had simply fallen short -- in 2 of 30 districts, for example, five adequately documented persons were not presented. Another dispute involved whether Ntaganda had a properly registered notary public at the congress to record attendees. However, the Ministry decision was not final; Ntaganda could continue his efforts to register his party. "He does not have to start from scratch," said the official. "We see his registration problems as minor ones."

¶12. (C) Comment. Precise and manifold registration requirements are found in other areas of Rwandan activity -- NGO registration, the tax code, environmental requirements for local businesses. The ultimate goal for the GOR is to demonstrate that it can evaluate such requirements in an even-handed manner, which the Rwandan public can accept. The PSI had championed the idea that opposition to the government did not equal improper dissent or divisionism. This may have raised some hackles within the government and ruling party. We will monitor this case, to see if the various registration failings are overcome. End Comment.